



Attitude of Young Adults towards Transgender Community in Idukki, Kerala

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ABSTRACT: Transgender individuals are often found to be vulnerable and ostracized due to societal stereotypes and the unwelcoming attitude of people. Being born with male or female anatomies but feeling different from the sex they have been born with often makes them marginalized as they do not fall into the category of the widely accepted binary genders. The study attempts to encapsulate the attitude and gender differences in the attitude towards transgender individuals of the Idukki district of Kerala, India. The study has adopted a quantitative, descriptive design. The research problem raised in the study is expressed as: What is the attitude of young people in Kerala towards transgender people? "The Attitudes toward Transgender Men and Women (ATTMW)" scale by Thomas J Billard was used for the data collection from 60 students at a selected college. The study yielded a rather realistic and positive attitude towards transgender individuals in general. The study also documents the progressive measures taken by the Government of Kerala for the welfare of transgender community. The study has implications in understanding the general nature of Kerala's young adults towards transgender and the manifestation of gender related attitudes, in research, academics and in policy making.

Keywords: transgender people, attitude, prejudice, young adults, Kerala,



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Transgender refers to the broad spectrum of individuals who transiently or persistently identify with a gender different from their gender at birth (Glicksman, 2013). Transgender is an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, and move between socially constructed sex/gender boundaries (Stryker, 2006).

According to Transgender Persons (Protection of rights) Act (2019), "Transgender person" is someone whose gender does not match with the gender assigned to that person at birth and includes trans-man or trans-woman (whether or not such person has undergone Sex Reassignment Surgery or hormone therapy or laser therapy or such other therapy), person with intersex variations, gender queer and person having such socio-cultural identities as Kinner, Hijra, Aravani, Jogta, Kothi, Iravanis, Jogappas, Khusras and Shiv-Shaktis.

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Scientific discourse has historically classified humans into two primary categories: male and female. Individuals who do not conform to this binary classification are often perceived as "different" or as "others," and are consequently subjected to widespread societal discrimination. In human societies, terms such as *third gender*, *third sex*, and *transgender* are used to refer to those who are categorized as neither exclusively male nor female (Herdt, 1996). Transgender individuals are recognized by various culturally specific terms around the world. For example, *berdache* in North America, *xanith* in the Arabian Peninsula, *female husbands* in parts of West Africa, *Sambia boys* in Papua New Guinea, *Fa'afafine* in Polynesia, *sworn virgins* in the Balkans, and *katoey (ladyboys)* in Thailand (Aldous & Sereemong, 2008). Historically, the roles and practices of transgender individuals were often viewed as exotic or anomalous in many Western contexts.

Human beings differ in their thoughts, values, attitudes, and beliefs; no two individuals think exactly alike. Attitude has been defined as a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, which exerts a directive or dynamic influence on an individual's response to related objects and situations (Allport, 1935). The concept of attitude plays a significant role in various psychological mechanisms, including the construction of mental representations (Fazio, 2007), self-maintenance (Steele, 1988), and behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1981).

In India, societal understanding of the term gender has traditionally been rigid and binary. Individuals were assigned either a male or female identity at birth, and those who identified with a different gender were often subjected to social ostracism. The existence of a third gender was neither recognized nor accepted and was, for a long time, regarded as a physical or psychological abnormality. According to the 2011 Census, there were approximately 4.9 lakh transgender individuals in India (Times of India, 2014). However, estimates from transgender activists and advocacy organizations suggest the actual number may be between 60 to 80 lakh, as many individuals do not disclose their identity due to fear of stigma and discrimination. A study titled Human Rights of Transgender as a Third Gender reported that nearly 99% of transgender participants had experienced social rejection on multiple occasions (John, 2017). Generally, transgender individuals are excluded from their families and receive little to no social or economic support. They encounter a wide range of challenges, including lack of property ownership, low socioeconomic status, inadequate monthly income, poor housing conditions, limited educational attainment, absence of legal identity documents such as the Aadhar card, poor physical health, lack of familial support, and widespread societal hostility (John, 2017).

Despite the enactment of the Right to Education Act in 2009, transgender individuals in India continue to be denied equitable access to education. According to Jain (2019), 29.11% of transgender individuals in Delhi and 33.11% in Uttar Pradesh had never attended school. Furthermore, only 5.33% of transgender individuals in Delhi and 4% in Uttar Pradesh had attained a graduate or postgraduate degree. Low levels of formal education and the absence of vocational training contribute significantly to the economic marginalization of transgender individuals, often compelling them to engage in low-paying or stigmatized forms of employment such as begging or sex work.

Jain (2019) further reported that 89% of transgender respondents believed that no employment opportunities existed for transgender individuals, even those who were skilled or qualified. In both Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, only 6% of transgender individuals were found to be employed, and these were limited to positions in the private or non-governmental sectors. Notably, no transgender individuals were employed in government positions. The majority were engaged in informal or unregulated work, with 24.44% involved in activities such as blessing, singing, and dancing, 4.56% engaged in sex work, and 10.44% resorting to begging.

In terms of income, 3.8% of respondents reported earning less than ₹5,000 per month, while 52.81% had monthly incomes ranging from ₹7,500 to ₹15,000. Only 1.11% reported earning more than ₹25,000 per month. A study conducted in Chennai revealed a similar trend, where only 10% of transgender individuals surveyed were employed, with the remaining 90% stating that they were forced into begging or sex work due to being consistently denied employment opportunities (Jain, 2019).

Even when transgender individuals gain employment in the formal sector, they frequently encounter discrimination in the workplace. Many are compelled to leave their jobs within a short period due to workplace hostility and exploitation by clients (Jain, 2019). These findings underscore the systemic barriers that continue to hinder the socio-economic inclusion of transgender individuals in India.

Major Milestones in Transgender Community Development in India

Several key policy and administrative milestones have contributed to the gradual empowerment and recognition of the transgender community in India. These developments reflect institutional efforts to acknowledge transgender individuals within official systems, even though broader social acceptance remains limited.

One significant step was the inclusion of a “third gender” option in forms issued by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC). In November 2016, IRCTC introduced “transgender” as a third category alongside “male” and “female” in railway ticket reservation and cancellation forms (The Wire, 2016).

The recognition of transgender individuals in the electoral process followed a more complex trajectory. Although transvestites and transsexuals won the right to vote in 1994, many in the transgender community refrained from participating in the 2009 elections to protest the absence of a third gender option on the Election Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) (The Wire, 2016). While some transgender individuals had previously registered themselves under the “female” category, there was growing demand for a distinct “third sex” classification. In 2013, the Election Commission of India officially introduced an “others” gender option for voter identity cards, thereby formally recognizing the transgender community within the democratic process. An estimated 28,000 transgender individuals registered under this category that year (The Wire, 2016).

Notably, India took an early step toward the recognition of transgender identity in its passport system. As early as 2005, the Indian passport application included a third gender option—denoted as “E” for eunuch—well ahead of several Western nations (The Wire, 2016). Following the landmark 2014 Supreme Court ruling recognizing transgender persons as a third

gender, the Ministry of External Affairs updated the online passport application form in March 2015 to include "transgender" as a gender category alongside "male" and "female" (The Wire, 2016).

In the area of social welfare documentation, the state of Gujarat initiated an inclusive policy even before the 2014 Supreme Court decision. In 2013, the Department of Food and Civil Supplies in Gujarat passed a resolution allowing the use of the "others" gender category on ration card application forms. However, this provision remained largely unknown until it was brought to public attention by transgender activists advocating for community rights (Sharma, 2014). In 2015, the central government aligned with this initiative when a bench of the Allahabad High Court ruled that the "other" category in ration card applications under the National Food Security Act, 2013, must include transgender individuals (The Wire, 2016).

The financial sector also took steps toward inclusivity. In April 2015, the Reserve Bank of India issued a directive requiring all banks to incorporate a "third gender" option in their forms and applications (India Today, 2005).

While these policy changes represent progress in institutional recognition, societal acceptance of the transgender community in India continues to lag. Despite formal inclusion in various government and administrative systems, transgender individuals often remain subject to discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization in everyday life (The Wire, 2016).

Major developments in Kerala aimed at promoting Transgender Rights

According to Justice News (2019) and Archana (2018), Kerala has been at the forefront of advancing transgender rights in India, with several notable developments aimed at fostering inclusion and empowerment. Kerala became the first state in India to adopt a transgender policy in 2015. In 2016, a range of progressive measures were introduced, including the announcement of a monthly pension scheme for transgender individuals above the age of 60, the establishment of a residential school for transgender persons in Kochi, and the launch of G-Taxis pickup and drop services owned and operated entirely by transgender individuals. That same year, the state also witnessed the hosting of India's first gender-neutral football league in Malappuram, where women, men, and transgender players participated equally. Furthermore, Kerala became the first state to feature a transwoman on a magazine cover.

In 2017, several additional initiatives were undertaken. The state organized its first beauty pageant for transwomen and held a state-level transgender sports meet under the auspices of the Kerala State Sports Council. A justice board for the welfare of transgender persons was also established. Notably, Kochi Metro employed 23 transgender individuals as part of its commitment to workplace inclusion. The Government Medical College Hospital in Kottayam opened a clinic dedicated exclusively to the healthcare needs of the transgender community.

In the subsequent years, further progress was made. In 2018, the government announced free sex reassignment surgeries for transgender individuals. In 2019, Kerala became the first state to launch India's LGBTQ-themed theatre group, *Q Rang*, during its state Pride Parade, and introduced reservations for transgender students in higher education institutions. That same year, Heidi Saadiya made history as the first non-binary broadcast journalist in Kerala, while Zara Sheikha became the first transwoman from the state to be employed by a multinational corporation. Additional milestones include the casting of two transgender models in a saree campaign for the brand Red Lotus and the inauguration of the "Gender Park" in Kozhikode by

then-President Pranab Mukherjee, an institution focused on gender equality and LGBTQ policy advocacy. In Kannur, a portion of the district budget in 2016 was allocated to employment and skill training programs for transgender individuals.

Despite these progressive steps, significant challenges remain. For instance, while Kochi Metro's employment of transgender individuals was widely praised, many employees eventually resigned due to persistent societal stigma. Several individuals faced rejection from their families, were forced to conceal their identities, and encountered substantial difficulties in securing housing. Those who continued working at Kochi Metro reported ongoing struggles related to accommodation and social acceptance (Devasia, 2017). Similarly, resistance was encountered when a college in Kerala approached the High Court seeking a re-examination of the government's order to reserve two additional seats for transgender students in higher education institutions (George & Jayaram, 2017).

These incidents highlight the deep-seated societal misconceptions and prejudices that persist despite Kerala's otherwise progressive welfare and development model. They underscore the need for a nuanced, empirical understanding of attitudes toward the transgender community. In response, this study seeks to explore and encapsulate the nature and extent of prejudice embedded in public attitudes toward transgender individuals in Kerala.

Review of Literature

International studies

Prejudice and discrimination against transgender individuals are well-documented and persistent global phenomena. The report *Injustice at Every Turn* (Grant, 2012) provided a comprehensive examination of the extent of discrimination faced by transgender individuals in the United States. The study revealed that transgender people experience stigmatization across multiple public domains, including education, employment, and healthcare. Among the 6,456 individuals surveyed, 50% reported experiencing workplace harassment, while 32% stated they had either presented or felt compelled to present as a gender inconsistent with their identity in order to retain their jobs. Additionally, 71% of participants admitted to hiding their gender identity or transition to avoid discrimination (Grant, 2012).

Similarly, a 2013 survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, conducted across 28 countries, found that 46% of the 6,771 transgender respondents had experienced discrimination, while 28% had been attacked or threatened with violence on more than three occasions in the preceding year. Notably, even in progressive countries such as Sweden and Finland, nearly 40% of respondents reported facing discrimination and harassment on the basis of their gender identity (Hinrichs & Donaldson, 2017).

In Poland, a nationwide study examining the social conditions of 10,704 individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allies (LGBTQA) included a transgender representation of 7.2%. Among transgender participants, 27.7% reported unequal treatment by healthcare professionals, and 46.5% stated they had experienced discrimination in public offices or spaces. Alarming, 78.6% reported having encountered at least one form of verbal, physical, or sexual aggression. These experiences appear to correlate with mental health outcomes: 42.4% of transgender respondents rated their quality of life negatively, and approximately 72% admitted to having considered suicide within the past year (Hinrichs & Donaldson, 2017).

Public attitudes towards transgender individuals, while improving in some respects, still reveal underlying prejudices. According to the report *Public Perceptions of Transgender People* (Davis, 2001), although the majority of respondents were familiar with the term transgender and generally accepted transgender identities, their support varied by context. While 50% supported transgender adults teaching in high schools, only about 40% extended that support to elementary schools, gym classes, daycares, or scouting leadership roles. The study also found that 74% of respondents were comfortable working with a transgender colleague, 61% supported laws prohibiting workplace discrimination, and 68% endorsed hate crime protections for transgender individuals. Interestingly, when participants were given a brief definition of what it means to be transgender—intended as a form of educational priming—their attitudes became slightly less favourable, suggesting persistent underlying biases. The study further observed a strong correlation between perceiving transgender identity as a moral issue and the belief that it is a personal choice.

In Turkey, Polat et al. (2005) studied the responses of 47 relatives of 39 transgender individuals who sought sex reassignment services at a psychiatry clinic. The study revealed that family acceptance was low; half of the attending relatives were mothers, and many families attempted to conceal the individual's identity from their community. One-third of the families had not even disclosed the individual's gender identity to close relatives, reflecting significant familial and societal stigma.

A study by Sanchez et al. (2006), conducted across four private colleges, examined the readiness of medical students to provide care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) patients. The study found that male students with conservative political and religious beliefs exhibited significantly fewer positive attitudes toward LGBT individuals, particularly transgender people, compared to their liberal or moderate peers.

Similarly, Ardi (2017), in a study titled *Students' Attitude Towards LGBTQ: The Future Counsellor Challenges*, reported negative societal attitudes and limited acceptance of transgender individuals. The study also noted a general lack of research focusing specifically on transgender populations, as most existing studies tend to address the broader LGBTQ community without disaggregating findings related to transgender people.

National and Regional Studies

In Kerala, the majority of transgender individuals live outside their familial homes due to challenges associated with gender identity (Aneesh, 2017). The *Transgender Survey Kerala* (2014) highlighted the pervasive impact of societal and familial pressures, revealing that 70–80% of transgender persons enter into heterosexual marriages and have children. However, most of these relationships dissolve within a month to a year. The survey further reported that 54% of transgender individuals in Kerala earn less than ₹5,000 per month, and only 11.6% are employed in regular, stable jobs. Educational marginalization is also widespread, with approximately 90% of transgender individuals dropping out of school, primarily due to ridicule and discrimination from peers, educators, neighbours, and family members.

In a landmark judgment in 2015, the Supreme Court of India affirmed that transgender individuals are entitled to equal rights under the law and formally recognized the "third gender," thereby granting them the legal right to marry and inherit property. Kerala emerged as one of the

first states to respond to this judicial directive, receiving widespread acclaim for introducing a progressive State Policy for Transgenders, aimed at promoting inclusion, protection, and empowerment for the transgender community.

A transgender person's life in Kochi: Radha's (pseudonym) story (Fenn et al., 2020).

(An excerpt from the interview of a transgender)

"I may not fit into your stereotypical transgender." I come from a "normal" family. I am a sociology graduate. From my younger days, I liked dressing up as a girl. My mother initially supported me, but later on, she refused to do, and I left home.

The Hijra community is the place where I used to live before I returned to Kerala. Such communities are not found in Kerala, though it exists in other parts of India. If "our" people do not have any house or relatives, in particular, to live with, our community will adopt us. Most people in the Hijra community work as sex workers or beg. However, in my case, I do not like to work or live like that. I know cooking, tailoring, and housekeeping, so I have never worked as a sex worker.

Life as a transgender person is not easy in Kerala. There are many transgender people in Kochi who cannot go to work during the day due to their identity issues. However, in my case and some of my friends, we had stayed in Coimbatore and lived in the Hijra culture, so had got used to not worrying about others' comments. Other Kerala based transgender think that people will quickly notice their difference and discriminate, and this makes them hide. However, unless we go out and until society gets familiar with us, transgender will not be seen as "normal" human beings. I see it mostly as an issue of unfamiliarity. Keralites are very conscious about society's opinions, and though they, as an individual, may not have a problem in mingling with transgender people in private, in public they would be uncomfortable.

I had to face so many hurdles to make a living. I worked for 5 years for a local project. The salary was low, and the rent, food, and other expenses had to be met with Rs. 388 a day which was challenging. After a few years of trying out various jobs, I joined the Kochi Metro. Even though a job is not high paying, it still enhances your self-esteem and offers some security. This job also gives us some respectability. There is a degree of greater acceptance due to my job at the Metro. The money I get from my Metro job is not enough, and the timing is not so suitable, but I stay on because I am an ambassador for transgender people now and the chance for employment in the future for transgender people will reduce if we leave the job.

However, there are still a lot of challenges and harassment while doing the job. Many people do not come and sit next to us or mingle with us. Some point at us and laugh at us, and they make jokes about us. Keralites do not want the Hijra culture to come to Kerala. Transgender people are mostly seen in the cities of Kochi, Calicut, and Trivandrum, and perhaps, they are more accepted (relatively) in Kochi. Having all the laws, publicity, and policies is one thing, but our lives need to change for the better, and for that, a lot more needs to change. Let us hope it does."

The study Attitudes Toward and Beliefs About Transgender Youth: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between the United States and India employed an internet-based survey to examine public attitudes toward transgender youth in two culturally distinct contexts: the United States (n = 218) and India (n = 217). These two countries differ significantly in their societal, legal, and religious conceptualizations of gender and the treatment of transgender individuals. The study found generally positive attitudes among U.S. participants, in contrast to moderately negative attitudes among Indian participants.

Among U.S. respondents, key predictors of attitudes included general social conservatism—reflected in religious beliefs and political ideology—as well as gender-specific conservatism, measured by adherence to gender binary beliefs, and the attribution of transgender identity to environmental rather than biological causes. These predictors align with existing literature on prejudice against transgender adults in Western societies. Additionally, personal contact with gender and sexual minorities showed an association with attitudes at the bivariate

level. The findings suggest that the mechanisms underpinning prejudice against transgender youth in the U.S. are consistent with those contributing to transphobia directed at adults.

In the Indian sample, however, religion-based disapproval and environmental causal attributions emerged as the most significant predictors of negative attitudes toward transgender youth. Unlike in the U.S., gender binary beliefs played a minimal role, and political conservatism and personal contact with gender or sexual minorities did not significantly influence attitudes. Regression analyses accounted for substantially more variance in the U.S. data than in the Indian data, indicating that additional qualitative research is necessary to better understand the cultural, structural, and psychological factors that contribute to trans prejudice in the Indian context.

Research Gap

While numerous international studies have examined public attitudes toward transgender individuals, there remains a notable scarcity of such research within the Indian context. Although several studies have explored various dimensions related to the transgender community in India—including their social status (Dutta & Roy, 2014), socio-cultural exclusion and inclusion (Konduru & Hangsing, 2018), identity formation (Krishna, 2018), quality of life (Naskar et al., 2018), inclusion within the socially and educationally backward classes (Parashar, 2017), and the broader challenges of social exclusion (Vanitha, 2018)—these investigations have not specifically assessed public attitudes toward transgender individuals. Furthermore, only a limited number of studies have been conducted in Kerala to examine public perceptions of the transgender community across any category of the population. This indicates a significant research gap, particularly in understanding the attitudes of college students toward transgender individuals. The present study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of college-going youth in Kerala.

Theoretical Framework

Transgender theory is an emerging theoretical framework that seeks to deepen the understanding of gender and gender identity by centring the lived experiences of transgender and transsexual individuals. Unlike traditional gender theories, transgender theory places significant emphasis on the role of physical embodiment in shaping gender and sexual identity. It integrates embodied experiences with both the internal sense of self and the socially constructed dimensions of identity, particularly as experienced by individuals with intersecting and marginalized identities. As such, transgender theory offers a valuable foundation for bridging feminist and queer theoretical perspectives with social work practice and advocacy. It provides critical insights into issues related to group identity, structural oppression, and the complexities of working with transgender populations (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Research Methodology

The present study employed a quantitative research approach with a descriptive design. Systematic random sampling was used to select the participants. The sample consisted of 60 college students, with an equal representation of male and female respondents, all within the age range of 18 to 24 years. The population targeted for this study comprised students from the Humanities and Commerce streams of a selected college in Idukki district, Kerala.

To assess attitudes toward transgender individuals, the study utilized the Attitudes Toward Transgender Men and Women scale, a 24-item instrument specifically designed to measure

prejudice against transgender people. The scale comprises two distinct, non-identical 12-item subscales that separately evaluate attitudes toward transgender men and transgender women. The tool has demonstrated consistently high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha (α) ranging from 0.94 to 0.99 and McDonald's omega hierarchical (ω_h) ranging from 0.84 to 0.93 (Billard, 2018). It is cross-culturally valid and openly accessible for research purposes.

Data collection was conducted in person during January and February 2020. The questionnaire was distributed directly to the respondents, and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Findings and Discussion

Socio-demographic profile

The respondents consisted equal proportion of males and females from age groups 18 – 24, where 56% were from the 21-24 age category. 33% of respondents were from the Commerce stream, whereas 67% were from the Humanities. 58 % of respondents belonged to post post-graduation level of study.

Attitude towards Transgender

Analysis of the young people's attitude towards transgender people allows identification of some crucial societal aspects of socialization and impact on one's thinking pattern 35% of respondents had low anti transgender prejudice, while 33.3% of respondents had high anti transgender prejudice.

Attitude towards Transgender men

Among the respondents, 36.7% had low anti transgender prejudice, 30% recorded medium anti-transgender prejudice, and the remaining 33.3% had high anti transgender prejudice.

Attitude towards transgender women

41.7% of the respondents have low anti transgender prejudice, whereas 33.3% have high anti transgender prejudice, and 25% have medium anti transgender prejudice.

Attitude of males and females towards Transgender

20% of the male respondents had low anti transgender prejudice, 11.7% of male respondents had medium anti transgender prejudice, and 18.3% of male respondents had high anti transgender prejudice. It was found that 15% of the female respondents had low anti transgender prejudice, 20% of female respondents had medium anti transgender prejudice, and 15% of female respondents had high anti transgender prejudice.

Attitude of males and females towards Transgender men

It was found that 18.3% of the male and female respondents had low anti-prejudice; on the other hand, 11.7 % of the female respondents were found to have medium anti-transgender prejudice. 13.3 % of the male respondents and 20 % of the female respondents had high anti-transgender prejudice.

Attitude of males and females towards Transgender women

23.3% of the male respondents had low anti-transgender prejudice towards transgender women, and 18.3% of female respondents had low anti-transgender prejudice; 11.7 % of the female respondents were found to have medium anti-transgender prejudice. 13.3 % of the male respondents and 20 % of the female respondents had high anti-transgender prejudice.

Item-wise response

Responses to Transgender men

The responses regarding attitudes toward transgender men reveal an overall trend of acceptance among the study population, with a minority holding essentialist or exclusionary views. A significant portion of respondents (46.7%) disagreed with the statement, "Transgender men will never really be men," while only 3.3% strongly agreed. Concerning the statement, "Transgender men are only able to look like men, but not be men," 13.3% somewhat disagreed, whereas 5% somewhat agreed.

When asked about the statement, "Transgender men are unable to accept who they are," 40% of respondents strongly disagreed. Regarding the belief that "Transgender men are trying to be someone they are not," 33.3% strongly disagreed, while 5% somewhat agreed. Similarly, for the statement, "Transgender men are denying their DNA," 30% of participants strongly disagreed, and only 3.3% somewhat agreed.

In response to the statement, "Transgender men cannot just identify as men," 28.3% disagreed, while only 1.7% strongly agreed. When asked whether "Transgender men are misguided," 26.7% somewhat disagreed and 13.3% neither agreed nor disagreed. Regarding the statement, "Transgender men are unnatural," 30% of respondents strongly disagreed, and only 1.7% agreed.

Concerning the statement, "Transgender men don't really understand what it means to be a man," 21.7% disagreed, while 1.7% agreed. Finally, in response to the belief that "Transgender men are emotionally unstable," 28.3% disagreed and 5% agreed.

These findings suggest that, while most respondents express supportive attitudes towards transgender men, a small segment still holds misconceptions rooted in biological essentialism and gender normativity. The results highlight the need for ongoing educational efforts to challenge lingering prejudice and foster a deeper understanding of transgender identities within both academic and broader social contexts.

Responses to Transgender women

The study reveals a generally low level of prejudice among the respondents toward transgender women, though some underlying biases persist. In response to the statement, "Transgender women will never be real women," 28.3% of the participants strongly disagreed and 31.7% disagreed, while only 1.7% expressed agreement or strong agreement. Regarding the statement, "Transgender women are only able to look like women but not be women," 26.7% somewhat disagreed, and 3.3% agreed.

When asked whether "Transgender women are not really women," 38.3% disagreed, while 8.3% agreed. Notably, only 1.7% of respondents agreed with the statement, "Transgender women are trying to be someone they're not." A majority of respondents rejected the ideas that "Transgender women are unnatural" and "Transgender women don't really understand what it means to be a woman." However, 8.3% agreed with the statement, "Transgender women cannot just 'identify' as women," and 5% felt that "Transgender women are unable to accept who they really are."

For the statement, "Transgender women only think they are women," 26.7% disagreed, while 5% agreed. In response to the statement, "Transgender women are defying nature," 26.7%

disagreed, 18.3% somewhat disagreed, and 10% strongly agreed. Finally, 8.3% of respondents agreed that “There is something unique about being a woman that transgender women can never experience,” whereas 23% disagreed.

Suggestions

The present study brings attention to often overlooked yet critical aspects of non-binary and transgender community development, including the need for equitable educational opportunities, as well as strong community and familial support systems. Schools, higher education institutions, and workplaces must adopt comprehensive non-binary and transgender-inclusive policies to promote equity and fairness. Public policies must also ensure equal access to housing, employment, political participation, and cultural representation to facilitate the meaningful integration of transgender individuals into mainstream society.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to advocate for trans-specific health insurance coverage, recognizing the unique healthcare needs of transgender individuals. The widespread adoption and normalization of gender-specific and gender-neutral pronouns should be actively encouraged across institutions and public discourse. A dynamic emphasis must be placed on enhancing the overall well-being, safety, and both physical and mental health of transgender individuals. This includes the provision of dedicated, institutionalized care services tailored to the specific needs of the transgender community.

Social Work Implications

For society to move meaningfully toward genuine gender neutrality, it is essential to move beyond traditional frameworks of “gender diversity” or “gender inclusion” and adopt a more conclusive, research-informed, and practice-oriented holistic approach. This shift must recognize members of the non-binary community not as “others,” but as citizens with inherent worth and dignity. Within this context, social work education has a critical role to play. Social work programs should incorporate trans-affirmative curricula and offer fieldwork opportunities that actively engage with the realities of transgender and non-binary individuals.

Implementing coursework that affirms transgender identities enhances social workers’ understanding of the complex ways in which gender identity influences every facet of an individual’s life (Austin, 2018). Curriculum that addresses the implicit and explicit societal pressures surrounding gender, and the psychological distress experienced by the transgender community, contributes to a richer understanding of gender diversity and fosters more inclusive professional attitudes (Austin, 2018). Establishing a core understanding of transgender issues within academic settings provides a safe and supportive space for students to develop both micro and macro-level competencies before entering the professional field, ultimately benefiting the communities they will serve (Austin, 2018).

The findings of the current study have implications for family and child welfare, gender-focused social work, and policy research. Social workers and professional social work bodies hold the responsibility—and the capacity—to promote awareness, provide training on non-binary identities, and implement strategic interventions aimed at eradicating transphobia and homophobia. Cultivating cultural competence and actively working toward a gender-inclusive society must be prioritized within both educational and practice-based social work settings.

Conclusion

The rejection of socially constructed binary gender norms can be perceived as a contributing factor to the emergence of fundamentalist and authoritarian ideologies. Self-proclaimed moral guardians, who often position themselves as protectors of cultural norms and traditional values, may attempt to assert control over the transgender community by reinforcing rigid gender binaries. Such exclusionary attitudes and behaviours frequently lead to systemic discrimination against transgender individuals, resulting in their seclusion from mainstream society. This marginalization manifests across multiple domains, including education, employment, and community participation, and is often accompanied by stigmatization, bullying, and social ostracism due to non-conformity with binary gender expectations.

Despite these societal challenges, the present study indicates that a majority of the respondents demonstrated a heightened sense of awareness and sensitivity toward the transgender community. The findings reveal relatively low levels of prejudice among the participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that the study population holds a generally positive attitude toward transgender individuals, reflecting an encouraging shift toward greater inclusivity and acceptance.

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